

## **Maine CDC/DHHS Top Questions on 2009 H1N1 Flu November 3, 2009**

**Note: Maine CDC will now post the answers to the top questions related to 2009 H1N1 flu received by our public phone bank, e-mail, and disease reporting and consultation line at the beginning of each week. Our weekly updates on H1N1 flu in Maine will continue to be posted on Thursdays. For more information on how to stay updated, see the end of this document.**

### **Top Questions from the week of October 26:**

#### **Q. Where can I get a flu shot?**

A. The short answer is if you're in a high priority group and cannot find it, keep trying with your health care provider. The vaccine supply is increasing every week.

Right now there are few, if any, public clinics since there is not a sufficient supply of vaccine. This is the case in many other states as well. Eventually, there will be enough vaccine for anyone who wants it. In the meantime, we are distributing vaccine to those who are in the high priority groups. Right now there is a focus on pregnant women and children. So, the vast majority of vaccine is currently being distributed to schools, pediatric, and obstetrical health care providers. Early on, some vaccine went to hospitals for health care workers with frequent direct contact with patients and infectious material, especially to those with contact with pediatric and obstetrical patients. Over the past few days, we also received a very tiny amount of some adult-only vaccine formulations for the first time, so we distributed that to some specialty practices (pulmonary, cardiac, dialysis, etc) and large internal medicine/family practices.

#### **Q. Why are healthy school children getting vaccine and I cannot find any?**

A. The answer is threefold. First, all children are disproportionately affected by H1N1 and are at risk. Second, we provide protection to the entire community by vaccinating school children, since they are the major transmitters of flu. Third, we could not offer the nasal spray vaccine – which accounts for about a third of all vaccine received so far and the majority of the initial doses to arrive in the state – to many high priority categories of people, because it is only licensed for otherwise healthy non-pregnant people ages 2 – 49, and most priority categories of people have underlying conditions. It therefore seemed most effective to use this vaccine with our healthy school and pre-school aged children, although we are also distributing some injectable vaccine into schools and pediatric practices for their children with underlying conditions.

**Q. How are you deciding which schools are getting vaccine?**

A. The first few schools that held clinics this past week were simply those that had ordered early and were ready to vaccinate right away. Since then, we have received a surge of orders from schools across the state and not enough vaccine to fulfill these orders. We are distributing vaccine to those schools indicating readiness to vaccinate and we are also assuring an even distribution across the state and within counties in proportion to the population.

**Q. Who are the overall priority groups for vaccine?**

A. They are:

- Pregnant women
- All people ages 6 months – 25 years-old
- People with underlying conditions who are 25 – 64 years-old
- Caregivers and household members of those younger than 6 months old
- Health care workers

Please note that these priority groups add up to about 700,000 in Maine, and we have only received about 99,000 doses of vaccine in the state right now. This is why Maine CDC is asking that vaccine in state and not administered yet be prioritized for pregnant women and children.

**Q. Who are the priority groups for receiving antiviral medications (Tamiflu® or Relenza®) if they have symptoms of H1N1 or are heavily exposed to someone with H1N1 (for example, live in the same household)?**

A. They are:

- Pregnant women
- Children younger than 2 years-old
- People older than 64 years of age
- People with underlying medical conditions, including children on chronic aspirin therapy
- Anyone with more severe H1N1 disease such as that involving a pneumonia or a hospitalization (which children at any age are more likely to encounter)
- People in certain outbreak situations involving many at high risk – prisons outbreaks, for instance

**Q. Why are these two priority groups not the same, for instance, seniors?**

A. The data so far indicates that seniors are at low risk for contracting H1N1 since they seem to have some underlying immunity. However, if they do contract H1N1, they are at risk for complications and should receive antiviral medications.

### **How to Stay Updated**

- **Flu News:** View current Maine CDC press releases, Thursday morning weekly updates, and urgent updates from our Health Alert Network (HAN) by visiting: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/maineflu/flu-news.shtml>. RSS feeds are available for the weekly updates and HAN.
- **Follow Maine CDC's Social Media Updates:**
  - **Facebook** (search for "Maine CDC")
  - **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com/MEPublicHealth>)
  - **MySpace** ([www.myspace.com/mainepublichealth](http://www.myspace.com/mainepublichealth))
  - **Maine CDC's Blog** (<http://mainepublichealth.blogspot.com>)
- **H1N1 Conference Calls:** Maine CDC will be holding conference calls to provide updates and take questions on H1N1. The next call will be held **Monday, November 9, from noon to 1 pm**. To participate, call 1-800-914-3396 and enter pass code 473623#. During calls, please press \*6 to mute your line and #6 to un-mute when you are actively participating.

### **Call or Email Us**

- For clinical consultation, outbreak management guidance, and reporting of an outbreak of H1N1 call Maine CDC's toll free 24-hour phone line at: 1-800-821-5821.
- General Public Call-in Number for Questions: 1-888-257-0990  
Deaf and Hard of Hearing phone number: 1-800-606-0215  
Phone lines are open Monday - Friday 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- Email your questions to: [flu.questions@maine.gov](mailto:flu.questions@maine.gov)